

TITLE: Leaving Google: Notes from Outside the Comfort Zone

A ship is safe in harbor, but that is not what ships are for.
- Grace Hopper

In the middle of last year I left a senior position at Google to grow my previously-small psychotherapy practice to full time. I had been working at Google and concurrently seeing clients on the side for 10+ years -- the last four years as a licensed therapist and before that as an intern. Juggling these two roles over the course of many years usually felt like a good mix -- keeping the stability and reward of my tech role while also maintaining my interest in psychotherapy and helping clients.

When I decided to walk away from Google a number of months ago I got a variety of responses from friends and colleagues. Some folks (including a few therapists) cocked their head a bit and ask why I would leave a senior gig at Google -- a place many are trying to join -- to do something so hard and less secure or lucrative. Other friends expressed admiration for the leap I've taken -- perhaps imaging themselves doing the same some day when they are fed up with their current jobs.

I can relate to both of these perspectives -- the apparent craziness of leaving a safe gig and also admiration for those who are willing to take risks to find something new and energizing. My decision to leave Google was made harder by the reality that working there was actually pretty great. Most people know about the prime perks of free food, on-site massages and excellent benefits. There is a reason (actually, many) Google has been named a "Top Place to Work" for many years running. I had a lot of autonomy and flexibility, a talented and supportive boss and a sharp and fun group of colleagues working to solve challenging problems. There were frustrations there -- as with any company big or small, but I liked our attempts to avoid becoming too bureaucratic or soul-less and relished the moon-shot approach to solving problems and the creative, mindful culture that has supported wellness programs like the mindfulness-based Search Inside Yourself.

So why did I leave?

I mainly left Google because I was in too much of a personal comfort zone and felt I needed to challenge myself in specific ways. For some people staying at a place long-term is the hard thing to do but for me it is leaving something that is secure and safe. While I don't have a desire to put myself in harm's way -- SF is an expensive city and building a full private practice is arduous work -- I also knew when I was considering leaving that to pursue my own personal growth I had to venture out and trust that I would emerge and grow through the experience. I knew that leaving could potentially feel premature (internal voice: how safe comfy you'd be if you stayed! Think of the free meals...the benefits...the stock...). I knew that I would miss the perks and security of Google but I had to leave and trust in order to have a fuller self emerge: working through the fear of leaving a safe place, figuring out how to market myself, learning how to run a small business.

I often talk with my clients about how we can find ourselves in a place with relationships and other parts of life that has reached a safe equilibrium that is more about over-protecting ourselves against perceived threats than about reaching our full potential. Usually these conversations emerge when that safe place is getting in the way of their personal growth. I

decided to work my own growing edge -- a big one -- by walking away from a pretty amazing place to find something deeper. A critical piece of this move was putting the right support in place, which has included:

Saving enough money to survive the period of growing my business

Eliciting the emotional support of my friends and family as I take on this major change in life

Continuing to meet regularly with my own therapist to process this growth experience

Paying attention to areas like nutrition, fitness and sleep to make sure I am my fittest self

Deepening my meditation practice to enhance my self understanding and resiliency during this time of change

Aligning these pillars of support have been critical in enhancing my resiliency and keeping me in a growth zone somewhere between comfort and anxiety (in Buddhist circles this is referred to as equanimity) as I do this work.

I've found in this adventure that I have a greater capacity to help others who are trying to do hard things to grow as people. Eleanor Roosevelt is credited with coining the maxim "*Do one thing every day that scares you.*" When I decided to set sail from the safe confines of Google it was a scary thing that day and there have been many scary growing opportunities since. It has also been enlivening and I feel honored to help others along the same path.